

The Municipal Tramways and Transport Association  
(Incorporated)

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# The Relation of Municipalities and Transport Services

OUTLINE OF AN ADDRESS

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DELIVERED TO THE CONFERENCE

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## THE RELATION OF MUNICIPALITIES AND TRANSPORT SERVICES.

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IN approaching the subject of "Municipalities and Transport Services," I do so by accepting the principle that, as roads are built by public money, any benefits from the running of transport on these roads ought to belong to the public. Nobody has ever suggested that the railroads built by the Railway Companies should be made available for services other than those operated by the Railway Companies for their own profit. If this is a good principle for railways and is accepted as such by Parliament and public opinion, it seems to me equally applicable to the roads which have been constructed by Local Authorities. All road transport, therefore, ought to be conducted as public services preferably under the State or the Municipality, but where this is impracticable then public control ought to apply, so that services would be conducted in the interests of the community and profits strictly controlled.

Mr. Beckett, the General Secretary of the Municipal Tramways and Transport Association, has submitted the following five principles as the basis for Road Passenger Transport Services, viz. :—

- " They must serve the greatest good of the greatest number.
- " They must be ample without being wasteful.
- " They must be supported only by their own revenues without subsidies.
- " They must not be exploited for private gain.
- " They must be monopolies, and, whether they are publicly or privately owned, they must be publicly controlled in the public interest."

Transport has now become such an important municipal service that it requires special attention and organisation, not only with regard to local needs, but also with respect to national direction and co-ordination. The municipalities have not made the proper use of the great power at their command, and have neglected big opportunities for development and expansion because of their failure to overcome insular prejudices and parochial barriers. The municipal

**Need for  
Re-organisation.**



transport service should be as well organised for national power and influence as the railways, the engineering industry, or any other economic unit we can think of. This can be achieved effectively if proper use is made of the Municipal Tramways and Transport Association by developing it along lines which would enable it to cope with the growing needs and numerous changes of municipal transport. As it is now constituted, the Association is only a skeleton of what it should be, and the local units are to blame if the Association is lacking in strength and influence.

Municipalities have invested over eighty-five million pounds in transport services, which aggregation of capital could be made to represent one of the most powerful and beneficial economic influences in the country. The municipalities owning these transport services probably control social capital worth at least five hundred million pounds, and employ about one million men and women in their service. This represents one in every forty-four of the population, and means much more if dependents are included. Viewed from this standpoint, the municipalities are a much greater power than the railway interests; nevertheless, the railway companies were able to persuade Parliament to pass a road transport measure in their favour, the operation of which may prove detrimental to municipal transport in the next ten or twenty years. The railway companies were able to secure this measure because they were well organised; the companies and the trade unions concerned combined to exercise pressure upon Parliament to protect their interests against what they considered unfair competition. If railway interests by organisation can influence Parliament, then municipalities could easily do the same. Organisation is the first step towards the realisation of this aim.

As I have already stated, municipalities have eighty-five million pounds invested in transport, and employ approximately 92,000 men and women, who, with their dependents, will make a total population of almost 360,000 people dependent for their livelihood upon the success and efficiency of municipal transport. This does not include the thousands of men who are engaged in the manufacture of plant, vehicles,



track equipment, and the thousand and one other essentials required for the various undertakings. The voting power here represented is enormous, and would be irresistible if properly mobilised. How is this to be done?

At present the municipalities provide the Tramways and Transport Association with an annual income of £3,710. **M.T. and T.A. and Research.** Obviously the National Association, with such a small revenue, must be restricted in its efforts, however able its direction. It cannot, owing to the lack of funds, provide the municipalities with all the help and guidance they require, and if the Association had an income of £100,000 to be spent wisely on legislation, research, co-ordination, and expert advice, it could become a dominating influence in the transport affairs of this country. The Association, with such an income, could exercise great influence in Parliament. It could conduct scientific research, the results of which would be valuable for the municipalities. It could conduct experiments and communicate the results to the municipalities. It could employ the most competent engineers for consultation and advice, and exercise general supervision over all questions relating to municipal transport. It would, in effect, become the power for municipal good in transport services in the same way as the Federation of British Industries acts for employers in general industry. The possibilities of such a scheme are unlimited, and I am convinced the difficulties confronting civic transport will not be surmounted until something on these lines is seriously tackled.

As I see the present situation, it resolves itself into a competition between private monopoly combines operated solely for profit, and municipal services.

An increase of  $\frac{1}{4}$ d. on each ordinary fare now in operation **Rail-bus combines.** would mean an increase in London alone of £3,500,000 per annum. On this basis, a similar increase of fares for the whole of Britain would produce £20,000,000. There are, therefore, great financial issues involved.

The new powers obtained by the Railway Companies, presumably for the purpose of co-ordinating road transport, are being exploited by the Railway Companies for the purpose



of forming combines with existing transport companies which are to be used to restore to the Railway Companies the semi-monopoly they formerly exercised over transport services.

New rail-bus combines are being developed almost daily, and it does seem as if the main object of their formation is to encircle municipal transport services, and to limit the scope and usefulness of their activities. If this continues it will mean that municipal services will be "cribb'd, cabin'd, and confin'd" within their own boundaries. This is distinctly fraught with menace to the welfare of municipal services. In my opinion, the best form of defence is attack, and, consequently, I advocate that Municipal Transport Authorities should set about enlarging their services and claiming for themselves the same powers in every respect as are now granted to companies under the existing laws. These companies have no responsibilities to the public, and are exempt from many forms of control which apply to municipal services, yet they are allowed privileges which are denied to almost every municipal service in the country. The remedy for this is not for each Local Authority to seek a Bill dealing with its own locality, but for all the Municipal Authorities to combine in demanding that the Government shall pass a Bill which will confer upon municipal services generally the same rights as are now enjoyed by private Transport Companies. I do not intend to enter into controversy regarding the merits of "*Trams versus Buses*," except to say that, if private Bus Companies, competing with Municipal Tramways, had not been subsidized either by shareholders losing their capital, or in some other form, it would have been impossible for them to compete effectively in any way with Municipal Tramway services. They have been given special advantages, not only in financial subsidies often obtained at the expense of shareholders in bus manufacturing concerns, but in being exempted from road and other burdens which have been too long imposed on the tramway concerns of the country.

**Municipal apathy.** My main object in agreeing to write this paper is to deal with the need for new methods on the part of Municipal Authorities.



We have been demanding that the State shall take effective action for the proper control of traffic conducted by private companies, but this does not absolve us from criticizing ourselves with a view to putting our own house in order.

Transport is a public service to be conducted for all sections of the community irrespective of party and, therefore, should be treated entirely on business lines. This method of dealing with communal services has already been accepted in respect to Harbours, Docks, Rivers, Canals, and many other utilities, so that in urging the extension of the principle to Transport I am not proposing anything that is new or revolutionary.

It must be obvious to every administrator of Municipal Transport that it is impossible to compete effectively with private companies in 1929, so long as our various services are managed by Committees and Corporations in the same way as they were managed thirty and forty years ago. It is important that Transport decisions to be effective, should be made expeditiously, which is impossible with the system now in operation. Municipal Committees are cumbersome and the *personnel* excessive. In most big cities we have Municipal Transport services. With two exceptions, the administration is conducted by a large committee *plus* a Corporation varying from 120 to 150 members. It is impossible for these large and unwieldy committees and corporations to manage a changing business like Transport efficiently and economically. The management is hampered and repressed, initiative is sabotaged, and experts, who would delight in initiating and furthering new schemes and ideas, are compelled by the present system to become mere "robots" carrying out the decisions of the corporations, the members of which know much less about the subject than the experts they appoint to manage the business. What is the use of appointing managers and experts at large salaries to conduct the business of Transport if corporations will not allow them to manage? If corporations are more competent to settle every question of detail affecting transport than the management, then they are wasting money in paying managerial salaries; they should undertake the duties themselves. Committees ought to be reduced



drastically in number and in a large city the maximum should be 10 members, who should be carefully selected by the Council because of their interest in and knowledge of Transport and should be entrusted by the Corporation with the administration of all the powers and Acts, relating to transport. The Corporation or Town Council will, of course, lay down the policy, but the carrying out of that policy should be entrusted to the committee and the management. This, I believe, has been done in Birmingham more than in any other city in the United Kingdom, with the result that they have been able to control outside competition, and have developed their tramway and bus services into one of the most successful enterprises in Great Britain.

**Vienna's example.**

Cities like Berlin and Vienna have also shown that they can manage transport much more effectively than we can. What British city, for example, has the imagination to undertake an adventure involving twenty million pounds controlling tubes, trams, and buses, as now exists in Berlin? The next step will probably be to bring aviation under the control of the same management, thereby co-ordinating all forms of transport under the one municipal direction. Vienna, which has been under Socialist control for some years, has also adopted a similar system, and in this Austrian city transport is regarded absolutely as a business, the management of which is free from all party politics, and is operated entirely on business lines. The policy is settled by the Town Council, and the carrying out of the policy is entrusted to Councillors, who have very wide powers of management, which have apparently been exercised with great success. I want to see reforms adopted in this country which would give the same efficiency in municipal transport here. It is for us who are councillors and administrators to urge these reforms upon our councils, knowing that, unless we do reform our administration in this way, it will be impossible for us to maintain our services in such a state as will enable us to compete effectively with the new bus combines in all parts of the country.

**Municipal Companies.**

I believe it will be necessary in certain parts of the country to form municipal companies for the conduct of transport services in large areas. The Lancashire Local



Authorities, for example, have agreed that they should ask Parliament for one licensing authority for the whole county. This means uniformity of control, but how can uniformity of control be secured without common ownership and direction? It seems to me impossible to have uniformity in licensing unless there is a pooling of all the interests involved. Lancashire offers a hopeful field for the municipal company experiment. Manchester and all the neighbouring municipalities could form a company, the capital of which would represent the present value of their undertaking or any other agreed valuation that might be mutually acceptable. This company should be controlled by directors representing the various councils in proportion to the amount of capital invested in the company. The Ship Canal, which is publicly owned, is managed in this way, and if Lancastrians agree that water transport should be managed and directed communally over a large area, why shouldn't they adopt the same principle for road transport? This would wipe out the question of boundaries and restricted areas and would ensure standardization of services in the enlarged area represented by the company which includes all the various authorities. Liverpool and District offer a similar possibility. There are areas in Yorkshire in which a municipal company could also be effective, and I believe that in my own district, which comprises the Clyde Valley, it will be necessary to adopt a similar scheme there before we can obtain the control and co-ordination necessary to prevent overlapping and wasteful competition. In London too the municipal systems should be united under one control. Municipalities will have to think of transport in much different terms from what they have been accustomed to doing in the past. The transport area is not represented by the boundaries of the owning authority, but is as far as the buses can travel or are required to go by the people in the locality.

Those who are best informed on the subject have no doubt **The Age of Speed.** that the tram is a safer and a more comfortable and economical form of transport than the bus. This, however, is not an age of safety first—it is an age of speed. A large section of the travelling public prefer buses to trams, and it is the duty of Local Authorities to satisfy this demand. If an adventurous public wishes to take risks in bus travelling, better to



do it under Municipal auspices than under profiteering direction. The younger generation prefers speed to safety. Municipal Authorities will require, therefore, to adapt their transport arrangements in such a way as to combine bus services with their tramway arrangements. Glasgow has now over one thousand tramcars and one hundred and twenty-five buses in its Municipal service. I believe that the number of buses will be increased to four or five hundred within the next few years. This may involve a reduction in the number of tramcars. This is probably typical of the adaptation that will have to take place in other districts.

#### **Long-distance Services.**

Municipal Authorities should be prepared to undertake long-distance bus services. There is no reason why this, the most profitable of road transport services, should be left to private enterprise. It will be argued that it is not the duty of Municipal Authorities to cater for long-distance traffic. My reply to that argument is, that if it is proper for the Municipality to carry a citizen one to ten miles on a local service, it is equally proper that the Municipality should cater for long-distance service as well. It should be easy to devise inter-city running arrangements under which the various Municipalities concerned could exchange garage accommodation and similar facilities for buses on overnight journeys. Excursion parties ought to be catered for also. If a party of Sheffield citizens wish to travel by road to London or to Aberdeen, they are entitled to ask the local Municipal Transport Service to provide the conveyance at reasonable rates. This would be mutually beneficial.

Let me give one example of what I mean—Glasgow, Edinburgh, and other Local Authorities have combined to construct a new road, 40 miles long, between Glasgow and Edinburgh, and, when completed, it will be the finest transport road in Scotland—100 feet wide all the way. Why shouldn't Edinburgh and Glasgow, who have expended the money for constructing this road arrange to run the municipal transport on it? Is it right that they should ask ratepayers to provide this road and then hand it over to private companies to be exploited for private gain? Similar instances occur throughout the whole country. All this seems to point in the direction of the necessity for councils specialising in transport. There is, undoubtedly, need for this.



The management of transport concerns representing five, six, and seven million pounds of capital is obviously a whole-time job, and if councils are going to do their work effectively in the realm of transport they will require to devote all their energies to it. This would mean drastic changes in the method of appointing committees, but if we can agree to appoint municipal representatives to public trusts for terms of five years, why couldn't we arrange that councillors specially fitted to deal with transport be appointed as transport organisers to carry out the policy of the councils on similar conditions? This would involve, of course, the payment of salaries, but it is now well known that if work is to be well done, then those who are doing that work must be paid in proportion to the services rendered. Members of Parliament are paid; the Directors of Railway Companies are paid; the Directors of Bus Combines do not give their services voluntarily, and neither should the future whole-time Directors of Municipal Transport concerns be expected to serve the public gratuitously. This and the other proposals that I have suggested may not be received immediately with approval, but I am convinced they will have to be adopted if municipal transport concerns are to survive in this country. Might I suggest in this connection that it would be worthwhile for the Municipal Tramways and Transport Association to send some of its experts to Berlin, Vienna, and other cities where municipal transport is conducted as a purely business concern for the purpose of investigating the systems of management there, and to prepare a report which might be considered by the affiliated municipalities with a view to adopting a common policy suitable to our Local Authorities. I believe such an investigation effected by this Association would be of greater value, and more likely to bring about reform than one pursued by an individual Local Authority.

There are many other directions in which national co-ordination, properly financed, would be beneficial. It is possible that schemes could be organised for co-operative buying of material which might help to check the combines and keep down prices. Even the manufacture of standard equipment is a possibility.

The more one thinks of the possibility of a great national organisation for municipal transport, the more

Tenure of office for  
Civic Transport  
Directors.

National Schemes.



attractive it becomes. We have the experts in our service who could undertake the job, but much will depend on the municipalities. If they continue to confine their interests to their own boundaries little progress will be made. Transport really has no boundaries, and our ultimate aim must be a scheme of road transport which will cover the whole country, and be controlled as far as possible by the public authorities. The enlarged Municipal Tramways and Transport Association might become the governing body of such a service, acting jointly on behalf of the Local Authorities and the State in all questions affecting road transport. The vista opened up by this idea is comprehensive and makes us realise how shortsighted and insular we have been in dealing with our problems up to the present. Whether we fail or succeed will depend on the efficiency and courage of elected representatives. If they grasp the opportunities now being presented to them and tackle their problems in a statesman-like way they need not fear that managerial and expert assistance will be lacking.

#### **Air Services.**

Ultimately Municipalities must aim at all forms of transport coming under the same control. This will include aviation as well as buses. The Glasgow Town Council regards the Transport Department as the proper authority to manage the underground travelling facilities in the city, and I am quite sure that if it is competent to look after their interests underground, the same management is equally able to supervise the air travelling arrangements as well. The municipal aerodromes which are to be erected in the next few years should therefore come under the control of the local transport committees, which could co-ordinate the various arrangements in connection with the numerous services which come under their control. I believe that another development in the provinces will take the form of bringing taxi-cab services under the control of the Transport Committee. It will therefore be seen that I am advocating a municipal monopoly of transport—a complete monopoly of every form of transport catering for the public.

#### **Taxi-cabs.**